

WomenUp: Rachel Kaprielian, Secretary of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development

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Jennifer Lefferts, Special to the Journal

Rachel Kaprielian

Title: Secretary of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development

Age: 46

Education: Bachelor of Arts, College of the Holy Cross, 1990; J.D., Suffolk University Law School, 2000; master's degree, Harvard Kennedy School, 2003

Residence: Watertown

THE INFLUENCE FACTOR

What's your advice for job seekers? Go to one of our one-stop career centers. It is a clearinghouse for resources. We're there to help people if they need a resume written, how to dress for success, how to learn Excel. It's almost like one-to-one counseling.

From state representative to head of the Registry of Motor Vehicles and now as secretary of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Rachel Kaprielian has spent the last 20 years serving the residents of Massachusetts.

And now, after spending the last 10 months working to improve services for the state's workers, job seekers and employers, Kaprielian has just a few weeks left in the Patrick administration before she embarks on a job search of her own.

"I don't know what's next but one of the great blessings I've had is that in my entire working life, I have always known why I go to work, why it's meaningful and that it has an impact on others," said Kaprielian. "That's what I want. I want to be able to go to whatever's next having that met."

What have you learned since taking on your current job? The role we can play in workforce development. I see it as an incredible opportunity for real impact in putting people to work in jobs that are here in demand and growing. Some of those are not new-fangled high tech or clean tech or STEM, which is huge and critically important to our present and in particular our future, but things like advanced manufacturing. Manufacturing has been a pillar of our economy for 150 years and it is alive and well and begging for workers. These are jobs that pay well. If you begin at an advanced technology firm and you have a certificate, which is less than a bachelor's, you go in to a \$40,000, \$50,000, \$60,000-a-year job, which by definition is a ticket to the middle class. And there are 100,000 of those that are coming up over the next 10 years.

What is the biggest challenge facing workers trying to find a job? Having adequate training, and making sure we — the state — have that training to offer them. Another critical part of that is the dialogue with the business community and seeking their input and their initiative. And that needs to be everybody. Most people in Massachusetts work for small companies, 50 employees or under, and we need to make sure we're hearing those voices, too. Everybody has a stake in the game and they need trained workers as much as the workers need the training. We need to create opportunities so people can get into these good entry-level jobs with a career ladder and a good paycheck. That is my single-biggest mission that really lights me up when I come into this job every day.

Are the career centers well used? They need to be better known. We get plenty of traffic, but some of it is filing for unemployment. What we're trying to do is change the way people interact with this



agency and that means getting them to do things online. We now have 60 percent of first-time claimants doing an online application for unemployment benefits so we're trying to retool the career centers into not the place you go for unemployment. We're still there to advise and assist in unemployment, but we want to help people think about their next chapter. What do I need, where can I get trained, where is my next job? It's our goal and mission and passion to match. We're like match.com. We want to match people to their job and we can help get them there.

You spent several years at the Registry. What were some of the lessons you learned while there? Pilot programs. When I had a good idea, in order to not freak people out, I'd say "Let's do a pilot program" because what you get from a pilot program is data. And people will usually make a genuine effort to see if it will work. One of those was our relationships with AAA. I approached AAA and said in Rhode Island, you do renewals. How about doing our renewals in your offices? They were willing to pilot with us and it was a really successful endeavor. Now in six AAA branches, people are able to do license renewals, registration renewals and most importantly the (license) picture.

What is your approach to making government work more effectively? When I walked through the door here, one of our real challenges was the unemployment insurance online system. I went on as a fake claimant to see what it was, how bumpy it was, how complicated it was, so I had an idea of what the experience was. I have done that in this job, in my job before that and as a state rep to see what it is that we do. It's really important to get out there and see what it is that you do, what the business is and most importantly, how it matters, how it's relevant and what it means in people's actual lives.